

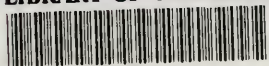
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ADDRESS

OF

Hon. * James * Speed

BEFORE THE SOCIETY OF THE LOYAL LEGION, AT CINCINNATI,
MAY 4, 1887, IN RESPONSE TO THE TOAST,

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

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LOUISVILLE:

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EXCHANGE

University of Chicago
JUL 15 1915

The following address was delivered by Mr. James Speed at the annual meeting of the Ohio Commandery of the Society of the Loyal Legion in Cincinnati, May 4, 1887. The address was in response to the toast, "Abraham Lincoln: Nurtured by his country, living for his country, faithful to his country."

Mr. Speed was in feeble health at the time, and accepted the invitation to make this response with misgivings as to his physical ability even to be present at the meeting. But it seems he felt that the end of his life was near at hand, and he rallied all his strength to speak a loving word in memory of Mr. Lincoln. Knowing that he could not trust himself to speak extemporaneously on account of his physical weakness, he dictated his address beforehand and read it from the manuscript. It was none the less effective, however, on this account. It was apparent to all that while the bodily strength of the venerable speaker was well-nigh gone, his intellect was clear and unimpaired, and his heart was susceptible to the most tender emotions. The address was received by the Society with the most intense interest. More than three hundred members were present. Perfect stillness prevailed, except the instantaneous applause which followed many of the expressions, the applause however as instantly ceasing in order that every word might be caught. At the conclusion the feelings of the audience found vent in long-continued applause, and Mr. Speed was at once surrounded by those who could reach him and overwhelmed by their kindly attentions, thanks, and congratulations.

Following the address the memorial of the Society in memory of Mr. Speed is given.



MR. SPEED'S ADDRESS.

Less than two years after the death of Mr. Lincoln, I gave a brief expression of my appreciation of his character. Then it was too soon for a general reception of his great and good qualities.

I then said: "When passion shall have subsided, and calmness and quiet come—a period he was only permitted to see from Pisgah's height—the large measure of his wisdom will be acknowledged by all men."

Since that time twenty years have passed; passion has gone, quiet has come, and all men now speak his praise.

I believe that in all the annals of our race, Abraham Lincoln is the finest example of an unknown man rising from obscurity and ascending to the loftiest heights of human grandeur. The conspicuous causes which produced this grand result were inborn strength, integrity of character, patriotic devotion, and the nurturing influences of a free country. At an early age he began to show the superior endowments which made him a leader of men. In the rough scenes of backwoods life his companions made him umpire in their sports and called him "Honest Abe." At the age of twenty-three his comrades in the Black Hawk war made him captain. One of these comrades now lives in Louisville—the venerable lawyer, Isaac R. Greene. He loves to tell how Captain Lincoln was a leader among the soldiers in that campaign, and attracted all by his good sense, wit, and anecdote.

I knew Mr. Lincoln when he visited Kentucky, twenty years before he came to the Presidency. He then showed he was no ordinary man. I saw him daily; he sat in my office, read my books, and talked with me about his life, his reading, his studies, his aspirations. He made a decided impression upon all. He had an intelligent, vigorous, mind, strong in grasp, and original. He was earnest, frank, manly, and sincere in every thought and expression. The artificial was all wanting. He had natural force and natural refinement. His after-life was a continuous development of his youthful promise.

When he came to the Presidency he was in the full completion of manhood, nurtured in the school of nature and our broad, free country. He was a grand structure, designed, fashioned, and furnished for a grand purpose. Thenceforth he was to live solely for his country.

The question of the ages had come to the test. Can a nation endure dedicated to the proposition that all men are free and equal? We now look back and see how much depended upon the character of the Chief Magistrate in that crucial hour. Generals might fail, but the President can not fail. He was to command through a four years battle. He was to be master through a four years tempest. At every point, at every moment, he must prove his full sufficiency. He must be wise, resolute, courageous, firm, patient, loyal, and true. He must impress all others that he comes up to the standard of this great measure.

And so it was; he was equal to the task; he so impressed all those who saw him rightly and truly. Those near him felt continually the mastery of his wisdom, and there were times when his influence was inspiration to all. I saw him in moments when his courage rose to the majesty of grandest heroism, and sent its strength leaping through the veins of his countrymen,

nerving them to sustain to the utmost limit the living ramparts of the nation facing the doubtful battle-field. His serene confidence restored the lapsing faith of men. His never-relaxing hope cheered them on to victory. Experience in hardships had given him a brave and hopeful disposition. Experience in professional life had disciplined and steadied his mind. Attentive reading and observation had taught him much. His learning was sufficient to balance his perfect practicality. It was that sufficiency of learning which comes inevitably in this land of ours, bountiful in all things, to such a man as Lincoln was, in the course of twenty-five years' diligent professional life and close attention to public affairs. It was sufficient to enable him to see things in their relations, and to act with intelligent discrimination; sufficient to give liberal views, dissipate narrowness and broaden judgment. He had learned the theory, the objects, the duties, the powers of this great Government. He had learned to know men. His own marvelously balanced humanity weighed men with unerring precision. He knew the real from the feigned. Truth felt assurance in his presence, and falsehood quailed. He had learned how to overcome difficulties, how to maintain composure in peril, how to be firm in doing and not doing, how to move neither too fast nor too slow. He had learned to think wisely. He said: "We must see things as they are; to-day is not yesterday, to-morrow will not be to-day. That which is right must be done." He had learned to express his thoughts in language of unsurpassed energy, aptitude, and beauty. His utterances in moments of intensest interest thrilled all hearts at the time, and will live coeval with the English tongue.

For four years he bore the burden of the nation racked in the convulsions of civil war. In that four years the events of

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: AN ADDRESS.

an age were crowded ; passion raged ; excitement rose without an ebb ; the earth shook with the tramp of armies ; the skies were lurid with the flames of battle. It was a period of subversion and revolution. Each day witnessed a new scene in the great drama ; each hour brought a new responsibility. Who can estimate the value of Abraham Lincoln's service to this country in that tremendous struggle ? He was strong when weakness would have been a calamity ; wise and prudent when rashness would have been ruin ; faithful when to swerve would have been destruction.

With all his lofty qualities the gentleness of his nature never abated. His simplicity, sincerity, and integrity remained in all the purity of youth when he was known as "Honest Abe." He had that charity for all men he pleaded for others to show. Quick to see imperfection, he was never exacting. He was patient to try and ready to excuse ; his forbearing spirit dealt with men, rejoicing in the good, with no harshness to the erring. He had no censure for the general who failed, but the comfort that came when the real commanders appeared, those only can tell who saw his relieved soul speaking in his countenance.

Nor did any feeling of hatred toward those in opposing arms enter his soul. Although his own election was made the occasion of the great revolt ; although he was misrepresented, derided, and insulted ; although the duty was cast upon him of sending forth the power of the country to the bloody battle-field ; although upon him were concentrated cursings and bitterness, he felt no anger, he uttered no revengeful word. In his patience and forgiveness he seemed to rise above the level of humanity.

The nation imbibed his magnanimity. The spectacle of so vast a collision, with none brought to punishment, stands alone in history. Only that group of fiends who stilled the pulsations

of Lincoln's great heart paid the penalty of crime. A maudlin sentiment has sought to cast blame on the officials who dealt out justice to these. One in particular is my distinguished friend, the then Judge-Advocate General of the army. Judge Holt performed his duty kindly and considerately. In every particular he was just and fair. This I know. But Judge Holt needs no vindication from me or any one else. I only speak because I know reflections have been made, and because my position enabled me to know the facts, and because I know the perfect purity and uprightness of his conduct.

Mr. Lincoln always trusted that truth and right would prevail. He never knew the feeling of exemption from anxiety. He was a stranger to rest and repose. His form bent under the weight of his great charge. Care furrowed his countenance. But he had confidence in the ultimate triumph of the right. That confidence lighted his pathway from his youth; it inspired him when the passions of his countrymen were aflame to predict that the mystic chords of memory would swell the chorus of the Union when touched by the better angels of our nature.

We wish he could have lived to see the fulfillment of this prophetic vision. But the curtain which veiled the new and glorious era of the nation was just lifting when his eyes forever closed. Great as our country then was, we now contrast it with the present. The fiery tempest of war did not overthrow the giant plant of the American Republic. It burnt the poison from its sap, expanded its beneficence, and sent its roots deeper in eternal foundations.

We wish Mr. Lincoln could have seen the North and South come together in a loving embrace to bury every hostile thought, and "kiss again with tears." We wish he could have seen the

East and West bound together with iron bands, and the growth from thirty to sixty millions. We wish he were living to-day in the midst of his peaceful and happy countrymen. We wish we could now see him reposing in the comfortable retirement of his home, beholding, at a venerable age, the present splendors of our glorious Union. For the Union he felt the most intense love, and for those who went to the battle in her cause his tender solicitude was like that of the fond ones waiting and praying at home. These are his words near the end of the conflict :

“ Let us finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation’s wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and orphans : to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.”

We wish he could have seen the consummation of all his patriotic hopes, as it is our privilege to see it this day. Were it possible for him to be here now in this great assembly of gallant soldiers, whose heroism sustained and preserved the Union, he would take you each one affectionately by the hand, and from the depths of his grateful soul say, God bless you !



JAMES SPEED,

Born in Jefferson County, Kentucky, March 11, 1812, Died near
Louisville, Kentucky, June 25, 1887.

TO THE COMMANDER AND COMPANIONS OF THE OHIO COMMANDERY OF THE
LOYAL LEGION:

The members of the committee appointed to prepare a memorial of our deceased companion, James Speed, knew him personally for many years. They would gladly dwell at greater length than is here permissible upon the amiable and sterling qualities that gained for him the esteem and confidence of all who knew him. The virtues of his private life were conspicuous and attractive, his sympathies were warm and lively, his sense of justice and devotion to the right unfaltering.

Mr. Speed was born in Jefferson County, Kentucky, near the city of Louisville, in 1812. His people were identified with Kentucky from early pioneer days, and were active participants in the best political life of the infant State. He inherited a repugnance to all oppression, an aversion to slavery, and a love for intellectual as well as physical freedom. Throughout a long life his judgments were tolerant yet firm. He never sought station, nor did he ever decline a public or a private duty.

After graduating at St. Joseph's College, he entered the profession of the law, which he pursued with diligence and large

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success. His well-known anti-slavery opinions precluded a political career, and he made no appearance in active public life until the breaking out of the civil war.

He had then almost reached his fiftieth year, had established his reputation as a jurist, and was cordially recognized, even by those totally opposed to him upon the irritating issues of the time, as thoroughly upright, consistent, and able.

A powerful element strove to commit Kentucky to the cause of the rebellion. Against this attempt Mr. Speed enlisted all his abilities and influence. He was active in the work of counsel and preparation. The labors of him and others of like sentiments saved Kentucky to the Union cause and enabled her loyal majority to organize and control.

Mr. Speed had been from his early manhood a personal friend of Abraham Lincoln; their association had been intimate, and each knew and appreciated the qualities of the other. When war came, Mr. Speed unhesitatingly answered the President's request that he should take part in organizing the Union troops in Kentucky. At a later day Mr. Lincoln called him into his cabinet as Attorney-General. His upright administration of that high office in perilous times and amid scenes of excitement and violence is matter of history.

The associations of responsible political life confirmed between Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Speed the mutual confidence that had commenced in their youth. The President found that time had but made more firm the ancient integrity of his friend and developed the justness and kindliness of his nature.

Experience had added wisdom to his other good gifts; the relations of the two were those of attached personal friends.

At the last annual reunion of this Commandery, on the 4th of May, 1887, Mr. Speed yielded to the general desire that he

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should respond to a sentiment honoring the memory of Abraham Lincoln. It was his last appearance in public. His feeble frame and tremulous voice showed but too clearly that his days were numbered, but they added an emphasis and a pathos to the eulogy that will not be forgotten by those who were there.

A little more than a month after he passed away peacefully and tranquilly at his home near Louisville, leaving behind him an unstained name, an honorable record of duties done and trusts performed, and a lesson of patriotism and loyalty.

JOHN MASON BROWN,	} <i>Committee.</i>
ANDREW COWAN,	
WM. H. MUNDY.	



